

The Alexander Thomson Society **NEWSLETTER**

Nº 12 JANUARY 1995

**BALFRON
CELEBRATES
THOMSON**

LIVERPOOL VISIT

WINTER LECTURES



**CALEDONIA ROAD: A SUITABLE
CASE FOR TREATMENT?**

ACTIVITIES

1995 WINTER LECTURE SERIES

Four lectures will be given at 7.00 p.m. on Wednesdays in the First Floor Lecture Theatre in the Bourdon Building of the Glasgow School of Art in Renfrew Street. Admission £2.00 at the door.

February 1st: *Harvey Lonsdale Elmes and Charles Robert Cockerell* by Gavin Stamp. This is intended as a trailer to our visit to Liverpool in April.

February 15th: *The Egyptian Halls* by Mark Baines. An analysis of Thomson's commercial architecture.

March 1st: *James Sellars* by Prof. David Walker. An examination of the career of the distinguished architect of the Thomsonian St Andrew's Halls.

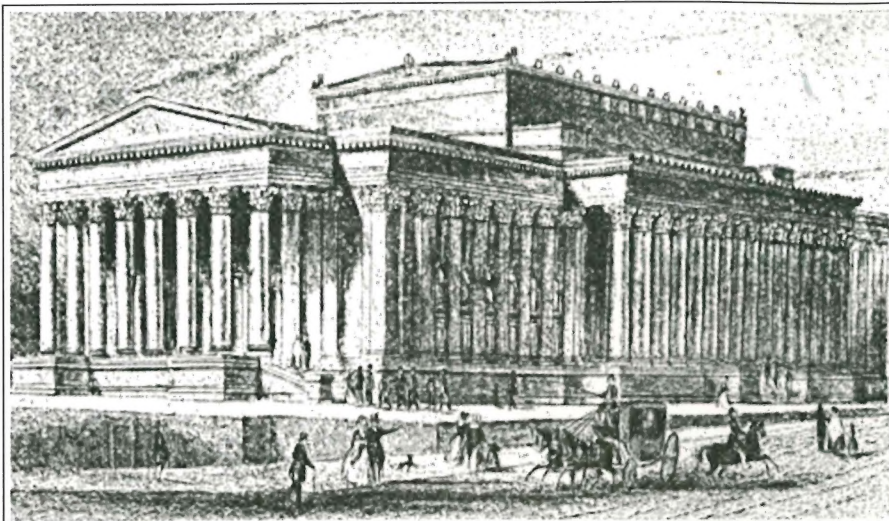
March 22nd: *The United Presbyterians, their Churches and 'Greek' Thomson* by Dr Sam McKinstry. Thomson's three great churches were built for U.P. congregations.

VISIT TO LIVERPOOL

31st March to 2nd April

This, our first trip abroad, was originally intended to take place over the weekend of Thomson's birthday, 9th April, but the coincidence of the Grand National at Aintree has obliged us to shift to the preceding weekend.

Our purpose is to see the magnificent 19th (and 20th) century Neo-Classical (and Gothic) architecture of Liverpool. Above all,



there is St George's Hall designed by Harvey Lonsdale Elmes and completed by C.R. Cockerell, which Thomson considered to be one of "unquestionably the two finest buildings in the kingdom" (the other being the Royal High School in Edinburgh). We shall be having a special and thorough tour of this astonishing structure. We shall also be visiting the Town Hall by Wood, Wyatt and Foster, and the sublime buildings of the Albert Dock by Jesse Hartley.

Other buildings to be seen include Cockerell's Bank of England branch, the remarkable commercial buildings of the 1860s by Peter Ellis, cast-iron churches by Thomas Rickman, the two great 20th century cathedrals designed by Giles Scott and Edwin Lutyens and the best turn-of-the-century pubs in Britain.

We shall be staying at the Adelphi Hotel, a luxurious *neo-Grec* pile

designed by Frank Atkinson and built by the Midland Railway shortly before the Great War. The hotel has offered us a very reasonable rate for bed, breakfast and dinner for two nights.

We have tried to keep costs to a minimum, and the most economical way of travelling is in a group by train via Preston. We shall therefore leave Glasgow Central on the 13.38 train on Friday, 31st March, and arrive in Liverpool at 17.55. On Sunday, 2nd April we shall leave at 16.10, to arrive back in Glasgow at 20.40.

The cost for travel, accommodation, dinner and breakfast if sharing a double room will be £88.00, £100.00 for a single room. Please make a definite booking by sending this amount (less any deposit paid) to the Chairman at 1 Moray Place by February 4th; cheques payable to 'The Alexander Thomson Society'.

Please support this venture.

1999 Award comes to Glasgow

All those responsible for securing Glasgow's victory in the competition for the Arts Council's award of the title of City of Architecture and Design are to be congratulated. This is very good news for Glasgow and for Thomson, for we would argue that the two are inseparable. Alexander Thomson, indeed, made his own contribution to Glasgow's successful bid.

Although his surviving masterpieces may cause problems, Thomson's buildings are among the supreme assets which make Glasgow world-famous for its architecture.

One thing is certain: that Glasgow cannot be taken seriously in 1999 if some of Thomson's finest buildings continue to rot. Clearly action must now be taken to secure the futures of three problems in particular: the St Vincent Street Church, Egyptian Halls and the shell of the Caledonia Road Church.



glasgow
city of architecture
+ design
1999

THE ALEXANDER THOMSON SOCIETY COMMITTEE

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Hon. Treasurer: Sam McKinstry

Hon. Minutes Secretary:
Colin McKellar

Committee: Mark Baines, Michael Davis, Roger Guthrie, John McAslan, Pippy McEwen, Mary Miers, Alexander Stoddart.

Our Patrons are
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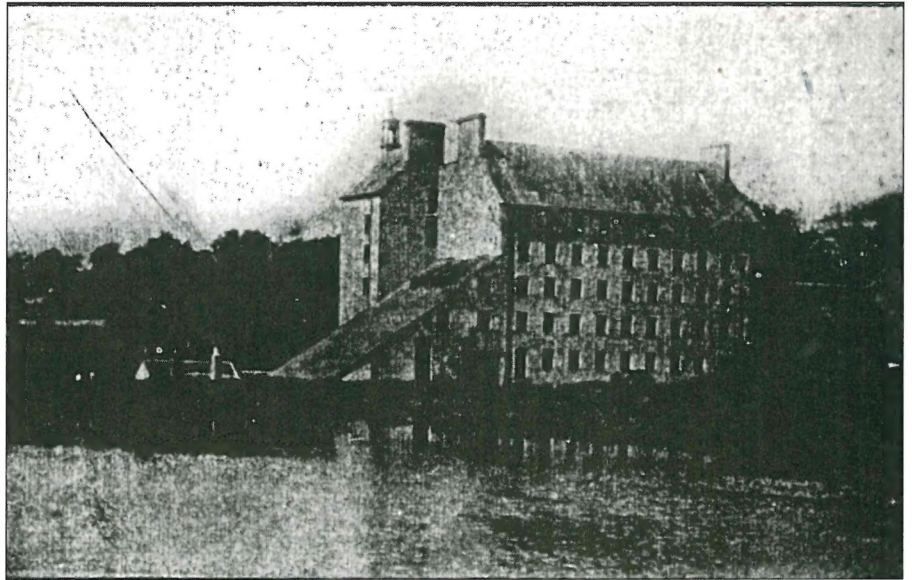
BALFRON: gateway to architectural history

On November 29th, your Chairman had the privilege of unveiling one of the new entry signs at Balfron which announce that the village was Thomson's birthplace. The initiative came from Balfron Community Council, who worked on the project with Central Region, which was responsible for the design of the sign. We congratulate Balfron on having the imagination to commemorate its most famous son; what other village in Britain is celebrated as being the birthplace of an architect?



The photograph (courtesy of Whyler Photos of Stirling) shows your Chairman with Mike Stone, chairman of the Community Council, and Alison Taylor, a collateral descendant of Thomson's. Later this year, the 120th Anniversary of Thomson's death is being marked by an exhibition and conference organised by Balfron Heritage Group.

An exhibition of Balfron at the time of 'Greek' Thomson will be mounted in the function suite of the Pirn Inn in the village for a week from 29th April to 6th May. Tracing the history of the village both before and after Thomson's day, it will focus on the early 19th century when Ballindalloch Cotton Works brought a boom time to that area of West Stirlingshire, and attracted John



Thomson, Alexander's father, from Carron Ironworks to Balfron.

*Ballindalloch Cotton Mills, Balfron.
Demolished 1898.*

In 1820, as in other weaving centres, Balfron was a stronghold of the Radical movement, and the village had its own story of the son of Balfron Radical Moses Gilfillan, who became U.S. Treasurer. The cotton industry and the Radicals will both feature in the exhibition.

In addition, Balfron Heritage Group will host the Scottish Local History Forum's Spring Conference, at which Dr Sam McKinstry will talk on the Balfron environment and its spatial, intellectual and theological influence on Thomson. Dr Callum Brown of Strathclyde University will continue the religious theme with a paper entitled, *The People in the Pews: the Scottish Churches and Balfron*, and there will be a lunchtime visit to the garden of Thomson's Old South



Manse, now a family home.

Other speakers include Jim Leiper on the textile industry and planned villages in the Ettrick Valley and Ian Bayne, vice-chair of the 1820 Society, on the Scottish Radical movement.

Day attendance costs £10 (inclusive of lunch), with details from Elaine Finnie, SLHF Secretary, Huntly House Museum, 142 Canongate, Edinburgh EH8 8DD.



Saracen Street: another Thomson tenement?

Professor Charles McKean sends a photograph of the long tenement block in Saracen Street (*right*) and wonders if it might have been designed by Thomson. As Saracen Street once led to Walter MacFarlane's Saracen Foundry, which cast Thomson's ironwork designs, a connection is certainly plausible. We invite observations.

The Alexander Thomson Society welcomes contributions from members and non-members alike with questions about possible Thomson buildings. Please send photographs (which will be returned) and the precise street address in question.

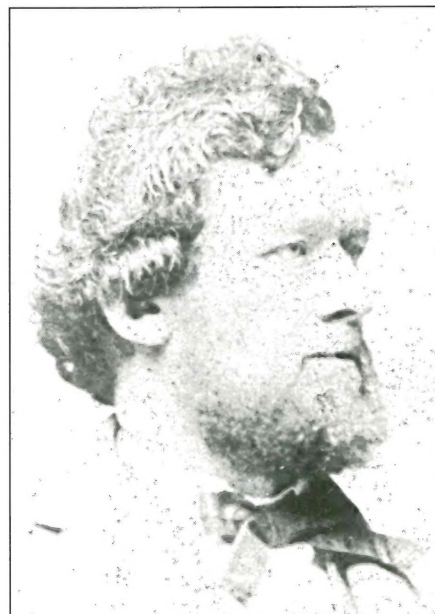
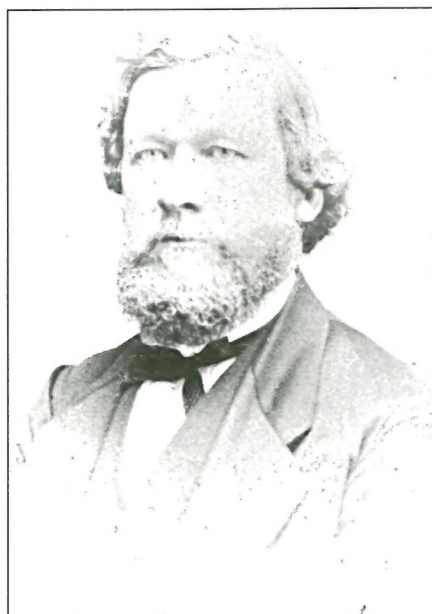


THE MANY FACES OF 'GREEK' T

One thing that has not been prominent in our past *Newsletters* has been photographs of Thomson himself. Now, owing to the acquisition of Holmwood, the National Trust for Scotland has been presented most generously with a number of historical items of great interest by Mrs Joanna Logie, Thomson's great-grand-daughter who is descended from his 11th child, Michael Nicholson Thomson (1864-1895), civil engineer.

This includes Jane Nicholson's scrapbook, which includes sketches by Alexander Thomson made in 1846, the year before they married. We hope to reproduce these in a subsequent issue of this *Newsletter*. For the moment, we illustrate a fine plaster bust of Thomson at the age of 30. This, which was once in the house of Thomson's architect son John, is, we presume, the work of his friend, the sculptor John Mossman, who was responsible for the later bearded bust now in the Kelvingrove Art Galleries.

We also reproduce here two *carte de visite* photographs of the bearded Thomson which have been kindly lent us by another of the architect's great-grand-daughters, Ann Hutchinson. The left-hand photograph was taken by J. Stuart of Glasgow and Helensburgh; that on the right by White of Glasgow.



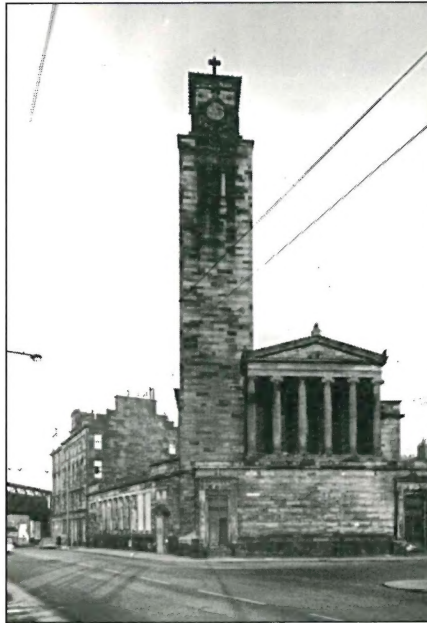
CASES

ST VINCENT STREET CHURCH

Developments here are generally very encouraging, thanks, in part to Glasgow's being chosen as City of Architecture and Design in 1999. As reported in *The Herald* for December 15th, the City of Glasgow is now committed to putting together a "funding package" to restore the church while the choice of the building as the principal venue for the annual Convention of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland will focus attention on both its glories and on what needs to be done. Meanwhile, the efforts to establish a charitable trust to take over the building are moving slowly ahead. Simpson & Brown, architects of Edinburgh, are investigating how, in theory, the building might be adapted to meet the changing needs of the Free Church congregation and are producing sketch proposals which, we hope, will not be in conflict with those being prepared by the Department of Architecture to improve the interior. For we maintain that, as the best possible use for any historic building is that for which it was designed, it is highly desirable that the St Vincent Street Church remains a place of worship while accommodating other functions.

CALEDONIA ROAD CHURCH

Some positive action clearly must be taken before 1999 to secure the future of the ruin of the Caledonia Road Church, for visitors will surely judge the success of Glasgow as City of Architecture and Design by what they find in the Gorbals. Fortunately, an encouraging possibility has recently emerged as a newly established trust based in London, the Historic Buildings Trust, has taken an interest in the church. Its projects consultant, Alan McCartney, agrees with us that the present plans for the church in the context of the Crown Street Regeneration Project are unsatisfactory as they leave the ruin isolated from the new housing, so making its external restoration and roofing for a new function even less likely. The principal problem is the north-south road planned by the



Roads Department of Strathclyde Regional Council. This both cuts off the church from the projected housing to the east and, by veering arbitrarily to the west immediately behind the church, compromises its architectural integrity by leaving an inadequate site behind for a new building.

For it is essential to grasp that the Caledonia Road Church was never conceived as a free-standing building but formed the southern apex of an urban block - the lost tenement facades immediately to the north both in Cathcart Road and Hospital Street being to Thomson's design.

We are therefore pleased to learn that Mr McCartney agrees that it is essential to restore the original straight alignment of Hospital Street. But the brilliance of his proposal is that he proposes to achieve this by diverting the traffic to the west of the church by removing the redundant railway viaduct. This idea is supported, in principle, by the Director of the Crown Street Regeneration Project but many obstacles must be overcome, not least the Roads Department of Strathclyde Regional Council. The Caledonia Road Church ruin is still a potent symbol. At present it represents Glasgow's prodigal and destructive recent past, but it could become a symbol of continuity and regeneration. It seems to us, therefore, that this is the last chance to restore and make creative use of Thomson's celebrated building and that every effort should be made to pursue this imaginative scheme.

CASTLEHILL, 212 NITHSDALE ROAD

We have been principally concerned in recent months by a case which ought never to have arisen. It concerns Thomson's villa, 'Castlehill', in Nithsdale Road, built in 1870, which had been used as a school for some years. In September we were notified that the house had changed hands and that a bonfire had been made of material stripped from the interior. No application for planning permission or listed building consent had been made.

Eventually an application was made by the new owner, Mr Charles Hamilton, and his architect, Richard Hall of Edinburgh, to divide the house into two. When we inspected the property, we found that the conversion work was almost complete.

We did not object in principle to subdividing the house, although Pollokshields Heritage has taken a strong line, for good reasons. What, however, we have complained vigorously about is that a listed building by Thomson should have been treated in so cavalier a manner prior to receiving planning permission and listed building consent for alterations. We therefore support the District Council's moves to prosecute in this case, especially as the house was also crudely stone-cleaned without permission. This case is particularly distressing as we would have been happy to assist the new owner with advice, especially as Dr Ronald McFadzean has information about the original appearance of the now mutilated gable ends. Indeed, we offered not only models for certain interior details but a correct Thomson chimneypiece to replace the grotesquely inappropriate Rococo fireplace now installed in the house, but our offer was not taken up.

Fortunately, painted and stencilled decoration uncovered during the work was recorded by the National Monuments Record of Scotland.

Nº4, GREAT WESTERN TERRACE

The restoration of this house is now almost complete and we hope to carry a full report in our next *Newsletter*.

ST VINCENT STREET CHURCH AS A MNEMONIC OF THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON

Contributed by James Stevens Curl

The Newsletter N° 8, of October 1993, contained an article by Sam McKinstry in which he questioned the notion that Thomson's design for St Vincent Street United Presbyterian church owes something to the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. While not wishing in any way to pooh-pooh McKinstry's reasonable and logical views, it is arguable that he has missed some pointers, and that he

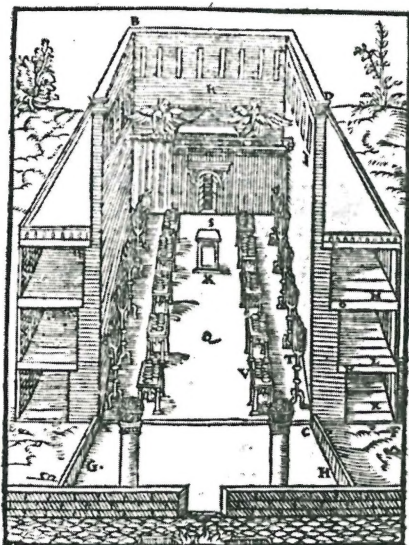
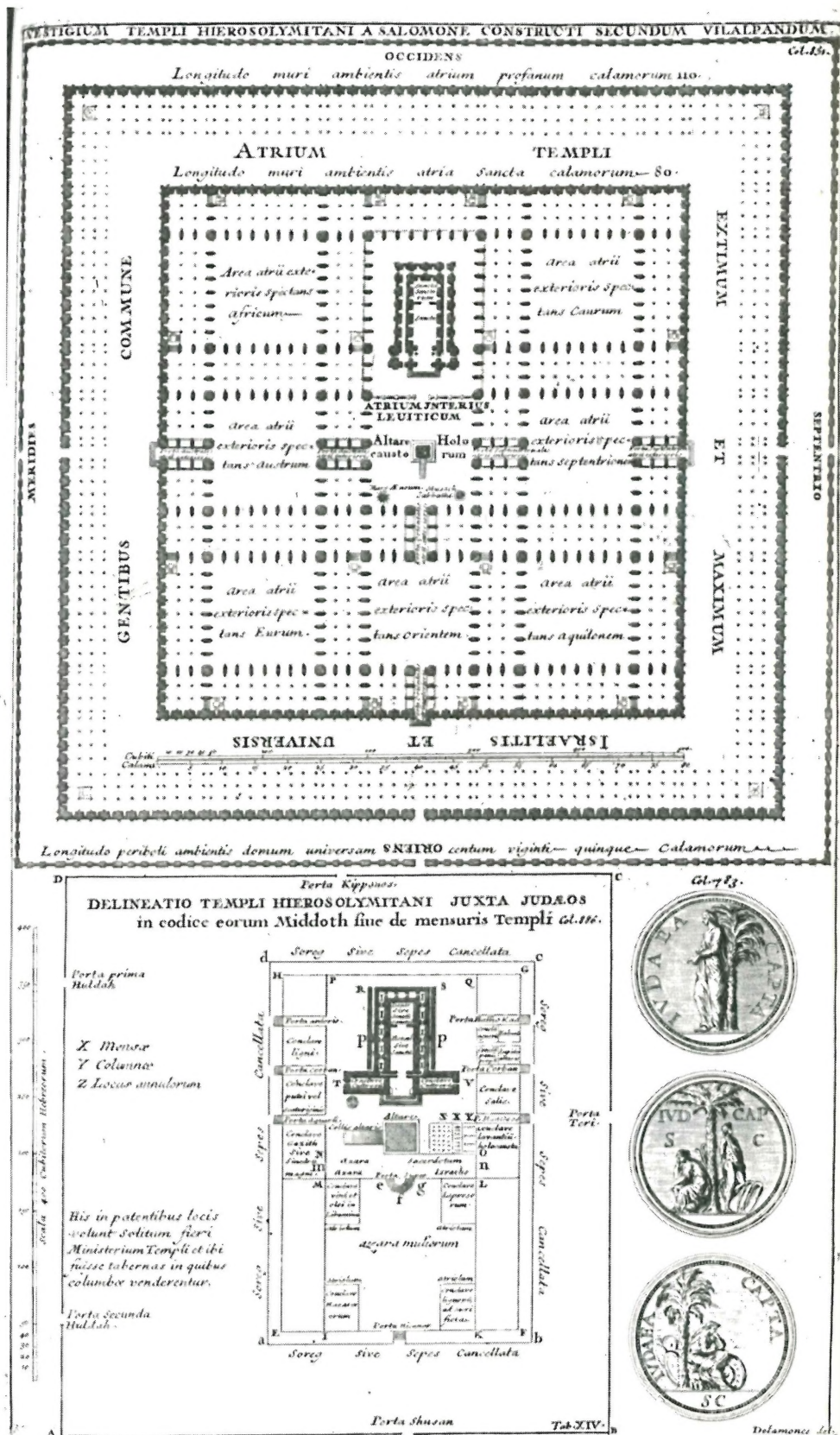


Plate 1: Version of Franciscus Vatablus's designs for the temple of Solomon (which originally appeared in the Estienne Bible published in Paris in 1540). The roof has been removed to enable the Ark and Cherubim to be seen. Jachin and Boaz stand before the main front (United Grand Lodge of England)

Plate 2: Plan of the Temple and its Precincts in Jerusalem by Juan Bautista Villalpando from the edition of his *De Postrema Ezechielis Prophetiae Visione* published in Rome in 1631. Below is a plan of the Temple based on Hebraic sources. This version was published in Bernard Lamy's *De Tabernaculo Foederis, de Sancta Civitate Jerusalem, et de Templo EJUS* (Paris: 1720). Note the store-cells around the body of the Temple proper. Jachin and Boaz are within the porch (The British Library).



DMON

has overlooked certain startling aspects of the architecture that do indeed link it with the Lost Ideal, the Solomonic Temple itself.

By the time Thomson was designing his Glasgow churches, images of the Temple were plentiful, and indeed many had been published since the fifteenth century. Among the best-known illustrations were those of Villalpando (1596), Lamy (1720), and Fischer von Erlach (1725), but there were many other illustrations in Bibles and in other publications that would have made the building (or interpretations of it) familiar. Many of these images are reproduced in the present writer's *The Art and Architecture of Freemasonry* (London: B T Batsford Ltd, 1991). In these impressions of the Temple, a vast platform plays a dominant role. At St Vincent Street church that massive podium-platform on which Thomson's 'temple' stands. Now this platform is necessary because of the sloping site and because of the accommodation required within, some would argue on 'functional' grounds alone: yet it must be emphasised that at all three of Thomson's great Glasgow churches the elevated temple on a platform is a dominant theme, and cannot be explained solely 'functional' requirements.

At St Vincent Street church the 'temple' has a prostyle hexastyle portico of the beautiful Greek Ionic Order from the Erechtheion in Athens. Six is a perfect number in Freemasonic numerology, as it can be divided by both two and three, and as one (Monad), two (Duad), and three (Triad) added together equals six (Aliquot parts): six represents health and justice, the Monad is male and creative, the Duad is female, ever-changing, and is matter capable of form, while the Triad is harmony, friendship, concord, peace, and

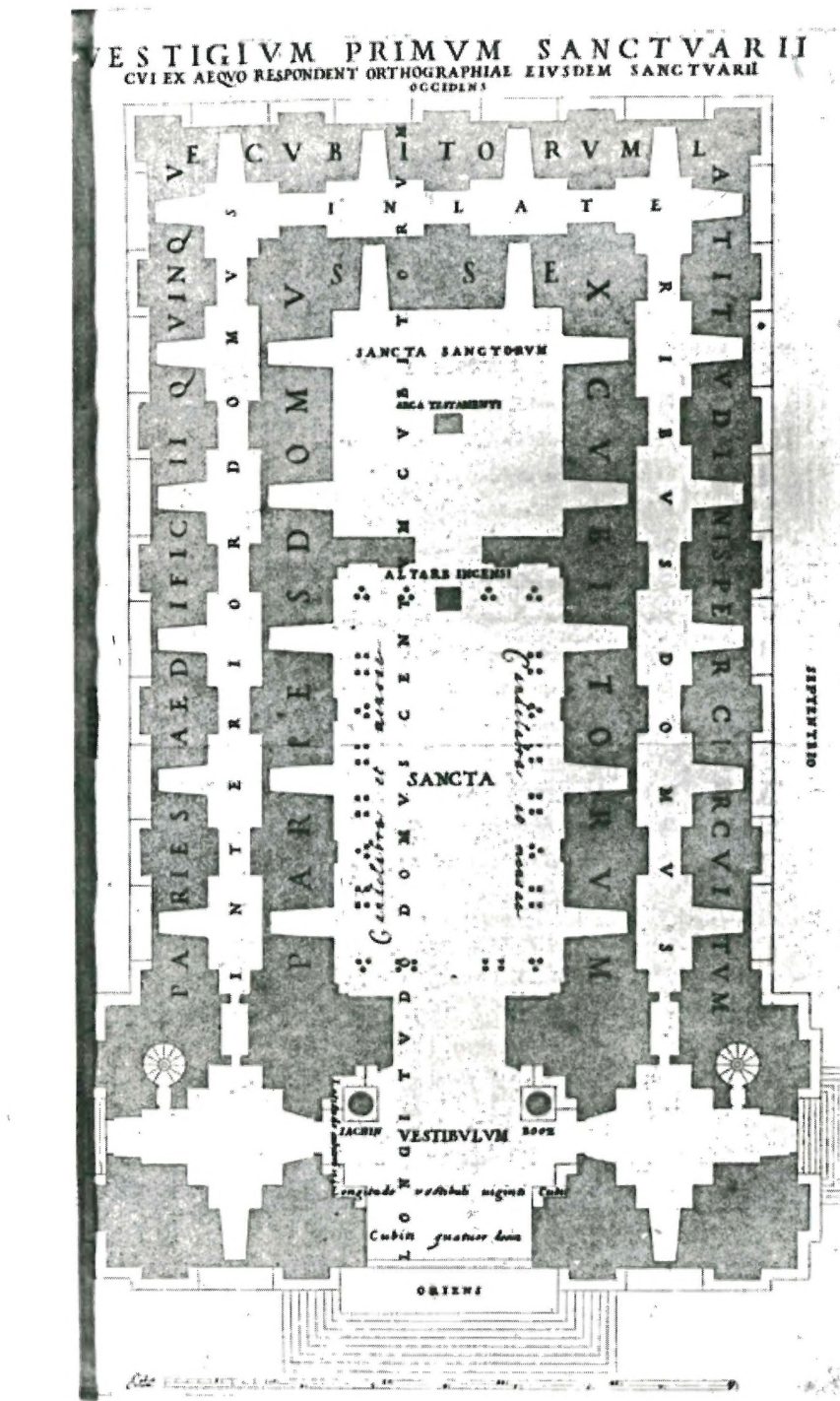


Plate 3: Plan of the temple by Villalpando from his *De Postrema*.... Note the porch, Jachin and Boaz, the body of the Temple proper, and the subsidiary elements grouped around it (United Grand Lodge of England).

temperance. The Monad is also God, and is indivisible. Monad plus Duad equals Triad, which is the world formed by the creative principle out of matter, and is the basis for the Pythagorean right-angled triangle and for the squaring of the sides of the triangle. Thus architectural principles have within them aspects of the Divine.

Thomson's great temple has nine clearstorey lights, which is perfection (3+3+3), while the side-galleries and

seating to right and left of the body of the rectangular temple proper are set within lower subsidiary structures in which a variant of the Thrasyllus Order recurs, and five subdivisions are set between two Graeco-Egyptianising pylons. These lower elements and the numbers of 'bays' correspond to those of the subsidiary store-chambers on either side of the Solomonic Temple itself, and the res

lance cannot be dismissed as mere

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SOLOMON'S TEMPLE

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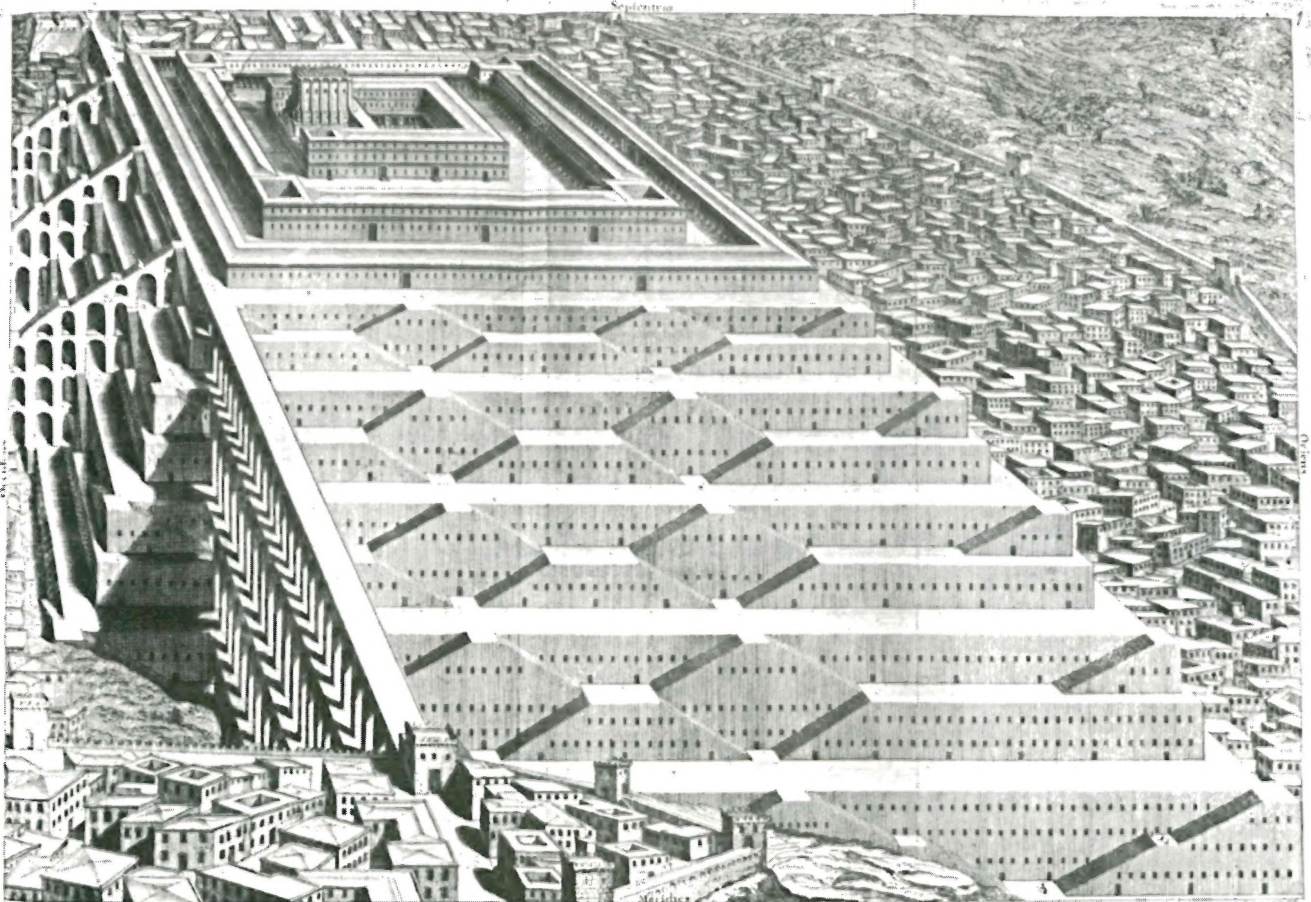
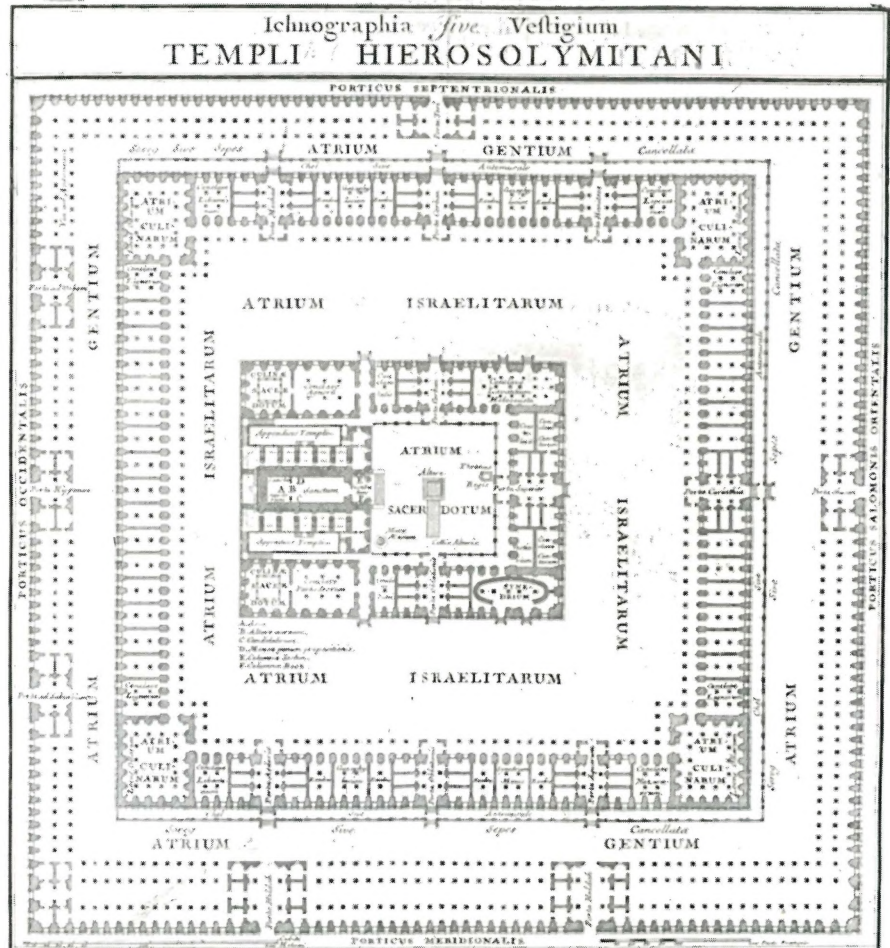
accident.

Matters are further complicated by the vestibule, which contains two remarkable columns at the bases of the stairs leading up to the galleries. These columns, therefore, also flank the entrance to the body of the high temple, and have capitals of extraordinary originality featuring anthemion designs and also what must be 'lily-work', referring to the 'chapters' of the 'two pillars' in the porch of the Temple of Solomon: so these columns are Jachin and Boaz, set within the porch-vestibule of the 'temple'. And what of those fantastic capitals on the cast-iron columns within the body of the church itself?

Continued on Page 12

Plate 4: *Plan of the Temple by Lamy, based on Chronicles and on the Mishnah. Note Jachin and Boaz in the Temple vestibule (The British Library).*

Plate 5 (below): *Sublime vision of the Temple on its platform from Lamy (The British Library).*



DELINEATIO SIVE PROSPECTUS OMNIUM ADIFICIORUM TEMPLI EX PARTE URBS AUSTRALI, NEC NON ET DOMORUM CIRCUM-ADIACENTUM.

DEAR GEORGE...

The first two of the five letters Thomson wrote to his brother George in West Africa were printed in our last *Newsletter*. In this number, we publish the third of these letters, a much longer document but one which, like all the others, is more concerned with family and business matters than with architecture. By the time he received it, George Thomson had been established at his missionary station in the Cameroons for over a year.

107 West Regent Street
Glasgow 20th Sept. 1872

Dear George

I duly received your welcome letter of - (I have not got it at hand and do not remember the date) Amelia has been keeping you informed about things in general so that I need not go into that field. You will see from the above address that I have moved from the old place and I am here only temporarily until an addition to the property (which I was told was to be begun at the new year time but not actually commenced till the middle of June) is completed when my number will be 122 Wellington Street. I expect that it will make a very nice office. It is of two apartments up 7 or 8 steps from the street. I am to have the walls lined with wood for the convenience of sticking up drawings under consideration which will be a great advantage to me. Union Street property is not quite finished yet and there is only one shop occupied that of Mr. Ballantyne Tea merchant from Edinburgh and it is said that it is the finest shop in Town. There is another let to Gilbey & Coy great wine importers who have establishments in London, Edinr. and elsewhere - and there are several people after the other two - Mr. Robertson is still unwilling to subdivide the upper floors and although we have had more parties inquiring no one has turned up to take a sufficiently large portion to meet Mr. R's views - The Smiths in Clyde Street were the only parties who made any very serious proposals but they would not give the rent



"Union Street property is not quite finished yet and there is only one shop occupied..."

asked and so they bought the property between Union Street and Melvill Lane including Thomas Hamble's [??] shop and have pulled down the whole concern and begun to build from plans by Mr. Honeyman - Mr. R is determined to get good rents though he should wait a while - He gets £350 for each of the end shops and a third party * is willing to give the same for one of the middle shops provided his arrangements otherwise suit - He is at present a member of a large Tea House which is making some change as to its partners just now - If Mr. R. gets £1400 for his shop floor it will pay him pretty well and have him the upper floors for profit - He is very proud of his building - A writer in the *Architect* says of it - "This is probably the architect's most successful effort, and we doubt if its equal, for originality, grandeur of treatment, or imposing effect, could be found in any city, not excepting the Metropolis itself" - The article was quoted in the *Citizen* and the opinion given above has been often repeated by those whose judgement is worth something - A good deal of the work in which I am engaged when I last wrote to you has been laid aside for the present in

consequence of the unpresidently [*sic*] high prices in all departments of the building trades - Iron pillars are 12/- or 13/- per. cwt Bricks 40/- per tn coals 30/- pr ton

The Jardine's bought an old property in Cowcaddens opposite the end of Findlay Street 93 ft frontage and are building it to my plans. It is for shops and warehouses and they are asking and likely to get large rents - They paid 8- per yd for the ground - John E Walker sold his stables in Cambridge Street to the Tramways Company and bought the Exhibition Buildings in Bath Street which I converted into Coach House below and stables for about 70 horses above which is now in full operation and he has since bought the unbuilt portion of Ashfield Ground on which we are now building another establishment of about equal dimensions - It fronts Smith Street and I have succeeded in making a very fine Elevation - It is expected to cost from 7 to 8000 pounds - We have had a very tedious and bothersome business with Robert Blackie's House in Great Western Terrace. Rodger and he are working at cross purposes and I dont know

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Dear George...

Continued from Page 9

how matters will be settled - We are now getting on with the painting of it with the Brothers Orr in the usual pernickitty way - We have made plans for a new Terrace at the back of Clow's range on the same principle as the Gt. Wn. Trc. but with 42 ft frontages instead of 54 but it remains to seen whether they can be built at a profit under the present high rates. If so a Mr. Mellis wright in Partick will take up the speculation and a son of Davit Anderson's wants one of the end houses. The plans are being measured to ascertain the cost. I made Plans of a Manse for John Stark but the cost when estimated turned out too high and it is not yet decided what we are to do about it. A set of Plans which I made of a double villa for Mrs. Adam and her son in Law Mr. J.H. Robertson are in the same position.

Your long letter has been the subject of a great deal of discussion amongst us. I got it copied by the young men in the office and we thought of sending* it to some of the magazines and getting the local paper to quote it. With this in view I gave it to Mr. R Blackie for his advice about it. He perused it carefully and his opinion is that however interesting it may be to friends it is not sufficiently explicit for general readers. He thinks the object of the undertaking should have been more distinctly stated and the suitability of the locality for the purpose pointed out. The height of the mountain stated also the height of the point you reached. Of course we could do all this so far but the suppliment would necessarily be somewhat lengthy whilst the parts referring to the voyage and other preliminary matters would require to be curtailed as these are out of proportion with the more important part describing the ascent of the mountain. Under these considerations we propose offering it to the "*Herald*" and John E.H. Thomson is to write a short introductory note. I wish you would write as soon as you can giving some details of your plans. The road

making seems to be a serious undertaking. Do you mean to build more than one house at different altitudes? - I think this would be wise. One House at a moderate altitude would serve to begin with and a second to follow next season would complete the establishment in a kind of way. I have a great many kind enquiries about you and kind wishes from friends here - too numerous indeed to name - We had a gathering of friends here (1 Moray Place) this evening to celebrate the 25th anniversary of our marriage when Jane was presented with a Toast rack and a gold chain. We are all pretty well just now. I have been very well ever since you left. The necessity of moving about seems to have been a great benefit to me although my duties are irksome and leaves me little time to attend to anything beyond what is absolutely necessary. I meant to have written this last month but Mr. Long's works are to be disturbed by a railway and he came down upon me to help him to make up his claim which took up my time for about three days just at the mail time. Kind love from all here. Your afft. Brother A Thomson

[Postscript in left-hand margin of first page:] * This gentleman has called upon me since I wrote the sentence and he turned out to be Mr. Balloch, Dr. Colquhoun's partner. He seemed to have known you and asked how you were getting on. He has separated from the Dr. and is likely to take the shop.

NOTES

- Thomson was moving his office from 183 West George Street to the building on the corner of West Regent Street and Wellington Street which he had enlarged and converted. It still stands, but in a much mutilated condition and is to be replaced by an external replica. Mark Baines described and illustrated this building in January 1993 in our *Newsletter* N°6. Thomson's letter suggests that his office was on the ground floor of the rear extension, reached from the entrance in Wellington Street. Close inspection of the fine photograph by Annan of

Egyptian Halls reveals that Ballantyne & Son, tea merchants, occupied the end shop on the left and that the one on the right was taken by W. & A. Gilbey. In this photograph, the first floor appears to be let while the second floor was empty as the windows are entirely covered by posters.

The site between Union Street and Melville Lane was filled by the new building designed by John Honeyman which is now known as the Ca' d'Oro.

- The Cowcaddens Cross building - 110-20 Cowcaddens Street - designed by Thomson for the Jardines had a curved frontage and was demolished in 1971.

- The Exhibition Buildings in Bath Street, which Thomson was converting into stables for John E. Walker had been designed by Baird & Thomson in 1854 for the Glasgow Architectural Exhibition, which ran until 1857. The curious history of this enterprise is given by Charles McKean in his chapter in the new book, "*Greek*" Thomson, edited by Stamp & McKinstry [Edinburgh University Press].

The Scottish Exhibition Buildings were demolished in 1875 to make way for the office building designed by Thomson at 87-97 Bath Street, which was itself demolished in 1970. The new stables for John E. Walker in Smith (now Otago) Street, Hillhead, demolished in the 1930s, are illustrated in Ronald McFadzean's *Life and Work of Alexander Thomson* [1979], pp.236-237.

- Robert Blackie, the publisher of *Villa and Cottage Architecture*, for whom Thomson designed the new Printing Works in Stanhope Street, took N°7 Great Western Terrace. The painted decoration executed here has since been painted over while the staircase has lost the "cast-iron balustrading" noticed by Thomas Gildard in his memoir.

- The new terrace and the double villa for Mrs Adam seem not to have been executed but a manse for the Revd John Stark was built at Duntocher in 1874-75. David Walker writes: "this was built, and was at

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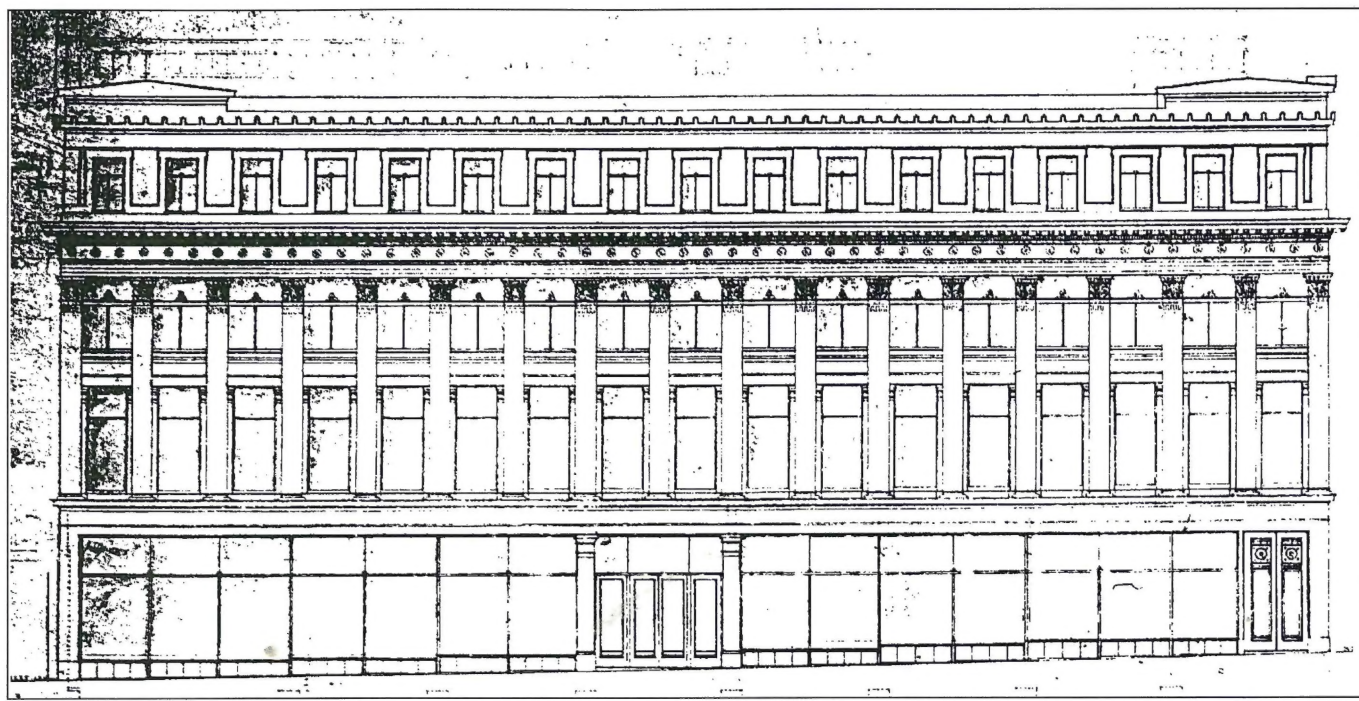
ALL CHANGE AT GLASGOW CROSS?

The deplorable condition of the beautiful warehouses in Watson Street and Bell Street by Thomson and/or Turnbull (see Newsletters N^os 7 and 8), continues to cause concern. Their rehabilitation clearly depends on the regeneration of this long-neglected part of Glasgow, and there is now reason for hope as

initiatives are taking place. The Glasgow Building Preservation Trust is taking a thorough look at the possibilities for improving the whole Trongate area, while the proposal to create an interchange station between the low-level Argyle Line and the high-level north-south rail viaduct within the Mercat Cross

building could provide the boost which is desperately needed (if Strathclyde can be persuaded to do the right thing—always difficult—instead of making two miserable and isolated new stations) and carry any regeneration east of the High Street.

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DEAR GEORGE...

Continued from previous page

Duntocher (see Small's Congregations of the U.P. Church). It was lost in the Blitz. Alfred Lohead remembered it as being "uncommonly good and finely situated on the hillside..."

- George Thomson's long letter of 20th December, 1871, describing the ascent of the "great Cameroons Mountain, or, as the natives call it, Monga-ma-Lobah - 'The Mountain of God'," was eventually published in the *Glasgow Herald* and was reprinted in the *Memoir of George Thomson... by one of his nephews* [the Revd J.E.H. Thomson; Edinburgh, 1881], pp.60-97.

- Thomson and his sometime partner, John Baird, married the sisters, Jane and Jessie Nicholson, at a double wedding on September 21st, 1847, conducted by the Revd Dr

Struthers at Castlemilk Place, Glasgow.

- The "Mr. Long" is probably John Jex Long, of Paton Street, Duke Street, who subscribed £2.2.0 to the Alexander Thomson Memorial. In the *Post Office Directory* for 1871-72 he is listed as a "manufacturer of blacking, congrave matches, fusées, Vesuvians, washing powder and liquid blue, timber merchant and saw miller" at 449-465 Duke Street, with warehouses at 40 Nelson Street and 28 Candleriggs; in the 1873-74 *Directory* the Duke Street address has changed to N^o 727. Much more about Thomson's involvement with the destructive impact of new railways will appear in the letters to be published in subsequent *Newsletters*. [Incidentally, regarding the puzzling remark in the previous letter dated

10th January, 1872, that "The Railway is proposed to go through part of the Hall" of the Caledonia Road Church, John R. Hume confirms that the viaduct was already in place before this date but considers that the threat may have come from an unexecuted proposal to widen it from two tracks to four.]

- Colquhoun & Balloch, tea merchants, are listed at 76 Wilson Street in the *Directory* for 1871-72, and in the 1874-75 *Directory*, Robert Balloch & Co., tea merchants, are at 88 Union Street, one of the middle shops in Egyptian Halls.

We are most grateful to Colin D.R. McKellar for his research into names and addresses in this letter and to Mrs Catherine Rentoul, Thomson's great-grand-daughter, for permission to publish it.

ROCKLAND FOR SALE

Thomson's A-listed villa in Helensburgh, 'Rockland', is currently for sale. The villa, which has been sympathetically modernised in 1993, lies on the sea front with direct access onto the shore and a panoramic view over the Firth of Clyde towards the Rosneath peninsula and the Cowal shore from a newly-constructed sunroom.

The villa, which features three double bedrooms, cornices, friezes and carved doors, is available at offers over £370,000 from agents Allen & Harris.

Glasgow Cross

Continued from Page 11

Finally, there is the exciting possibility of realising the new Adam-Piranesi Monument at Glasgow Cross proposed by sculptor (and ATS committee member) Sandy Stoddart, which could demonstrate how public art can have an economic impact. All these initiatives are linked, and if progress is made, the repair of the warehouses could become part of an important restoration project in the agenda for 1999.

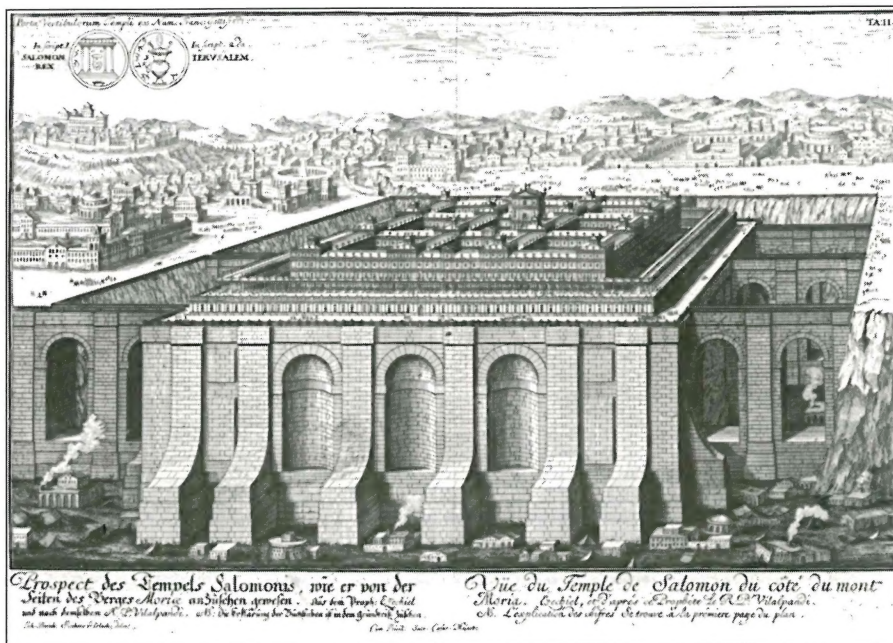
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THOMSON EXHIBITION

It is now proposed that Thomson's achievement will form an important part of the 'Second City' exhibition about Glasgow 1850-1950 proposed to be mounted at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris in 1998 and that in the following year this section will be expanded in Glasgow to make a separate exhibition about Alexander Thomson.

Solomon's Temple

Continued from Page 8



They are extraordinarily inventive, one lot showing the plant-like forms budding, and the other in full leaf and flower. Such exotic forms, it is submitted, were deliberate attempts to re-create the 'chapiters' of the Solomonic temple itself, and owed something to the design of capitals at Persepolis, freely interpreted with additions from Owen Jones and other sources, with Egyptianising and Grecian elements mingling in the heady brew.

Thomson may have been trying to re-invent a type of Semitic Order. Exotic, too, is the strange tower with its Indianesque top perched above four Graeco-Egyptianising pylons. Down below the clock faces are sculptured figures facing each other: these are surely the Cherubim of the Temple, with their stylised wings treated as blocks incised with

Plate 6: Fischer von Erlach's vision of the Temple, based on Villalpando (By Permission of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum).

anthemion-based patterns.

In a short note all one can do is to draw attention to certain matters that require a lengthy essay to develop. Thomson himself stated that the design of the original Temple was 'not controlled by any utilitarian consideration'. It is submitted that St Vincent Street church has many allusions to the Solomonic Temple, and that these are there not for utilitarian reasons either, but because the type of a Protestant church was, in fact, referred to widely as a 'temple', and because Thomson placed a coded message there for all to see and read if they can but open their eyes and their minds.

BACK ISSUES

OF THE Society's *Newsletter* are available, price 50p each plus 2 second class stamps, from the Hon. Secretary at the Society's address.

MEMBERSHIP LEAFLET

THE SOCIETY has reprinted its membership leaflet. If you know of someone who might be interested in joining the Society and supporting our work, please write to the Hon. Secretary at the usual address.